

GETTING SOCIAL

Using social media to attract your target profile.

by NAOMI COOPER, PRESIDENT OF MINOA MARKETING AND CHIEF MARKETING CONSULTANT FOR PRIDE INSTITUTE

One component of Smile Reminder's Xtend Platform is a social media interface that allows dentists to post updates and communications to Facebook and Twitter from a single interface. In addition, Smile Reminder Video helps the practice capture, manage and distribute patient testimonials over the Web.



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A Web site doesn't cut it

In "Web 1.0" (the original Web), content was king. That meant your dental practice needed a static presence on a single Web site, preferably with dozens (if not hundreds) of informative articles about the types of dental services and procedures offered in your

practice. Now, with "Web 2.0" (the Social Web), conversation is king. This is significant because it means it's no longer enough to have a single Web site that discusses the features of your practice and the services available. Why? Because social media raises the bar by enabling an entirely new kind of Internet experience for your patients

seemingly unreachable and made them part of a connected group," Dr. Haygood said. "The potential for marketing to a target audience of patients through social media is limited only by a dentist's ability to create content and the desire to spend time building relationships online."

tion flow that is diminishing the importance of traditional Web search," said Mark Olson, Vice President of Marketing and Business Development for Smile Reminder. "Every day our 'friends' online feed us information and recommendations about everything from a good movie to a good dentist, and we tend to place more trust

[Social media] enables patients to do your marketing for you by creating positive word of mouth about your practice.

—Dr. Lou Shuman, President of the Pride Institute

and prospective patients: two-way conversations with you, the dental professional, that actually become the content (called user-generated content) and replace the one-way consumption of static, manufactured content from you.

Dr. Ryan Haygood, a private practice dentist from Shreveport, La., has leveraged the power of social media extensively to feed his two fast-growing dental practices. "Online social networks have taken consumers who were once

Engage in the conversation

If social media marketing simply requires taking advantage of these online communities where dental professionals and patients can both easily move between the role of audience and author, it follows that it's critically important for dentists to be part of these conversations because one thing is certain: they are taking place—with or without you.

"The social media phenomenon has created an informa-

in those recommendations because we have a greater connection to the source."

What does this mean for you and your team? Dentists and staff should use these existing online communities to increase their practice's exposure, find new patients and have existing patients generate referrals by actively recommending you to their friends and family on social networking Web sites. Today, some of the most powerful word of mouth happens



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Get started

Here are just a few possibilities to make social media a part of your marketing plan:

- Create a Facebook fan page for your practice with status updates about your practice.
- Facebook advertising for new patients in your area, in a specific demographic.
- Create a profile on Yelp and/or Angie's List and have loyal patients post reviews.
- "Tweet" on Twitter about new technology or appointment availability.
- Blog about being a dentist and patient interactions.
- Post YouTube videos of patient testimonials.
- Record podcasts about popular services like implants and whitening.

through social media, not just through the old-fashioned grapevine.

"Social media marketing is extremely effective for dentists because unlike other avenues, they can directly target a specific market segment and truly become known as the local dental expert," according to Drs. Richard and David Madow of Reisterstown, Md., well-known speakers in the dental industry who also are known as The Madow Brothers. "Facebook, blogs, YouTube and Twitter allow us to dispense information, communicate with current and potential patients, and even fill last-minute cancellations."

Strategy matters

So, where to begin? First, understanding the purpose of social media is critical. No, it's not just for college kids sharing party photos. In fact, according to Quantcast, 32% of Facebook users, 38% of Twitter users, 46% of YouTube visitors and 79% of LinkedIn members are older than 35. Ivy Bean, age 104, has more than 55,000 Twitter followers and tweets from the care home where she lives in Bradford, England.

Next, determine your social media strategy. If you're looking to target a specific demographic group and are considering establishing a presence on one of the major social media sites, consider first whether your target profile is actually using that site. How can you find out? One of the amazing things about the Internet is the wealth of data that is readily available. For example, the statistics in the last paragraph come from Quantcast (quantcast.com), a valuable and free resource that provides a comprehensive demographic breakdown, as well as Web site traffic numbers, for any site on the Internet.

Do your homework, and if the group you're looking to target is using a specific social media network more than others, that should be a major factor in helping you decide where to focus your energy. For

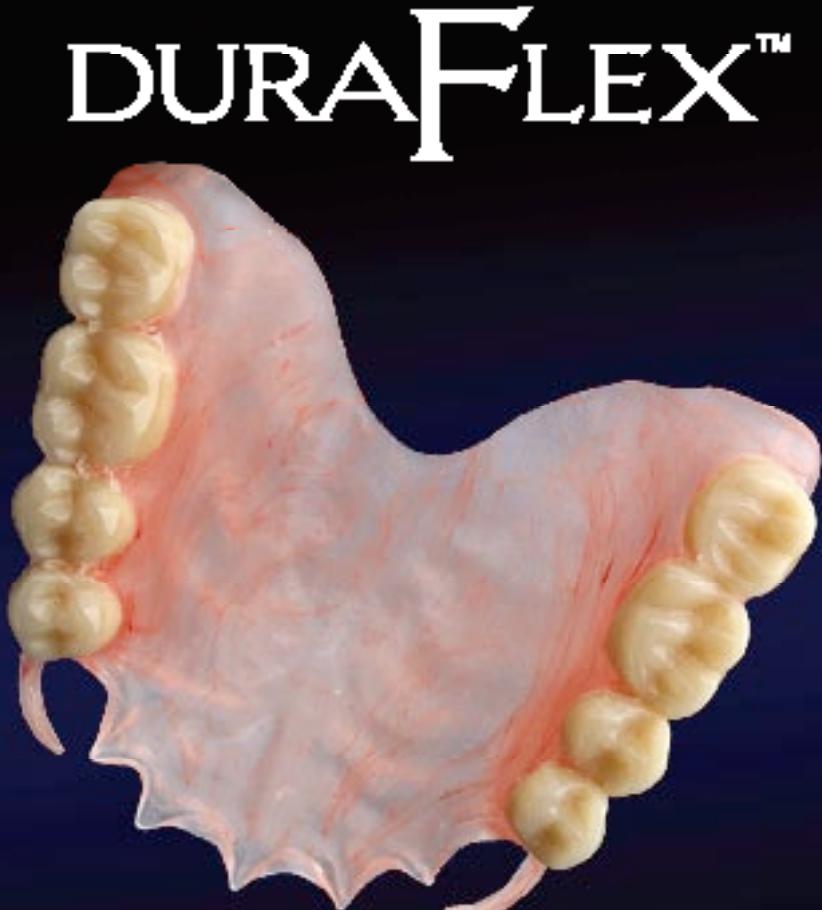
example, if you've decided to target high-income, stay-at-home moms, Facebook may be the way to go—Quantcast pegs 55% of Facebook users as female—and 48% have children. Plus, not only do 30% of Facebook users have incomes between \$60-100,000, but an additional 32% have incomes over \$100,000.

On the other hand, if your practice is in an urban business district and you're looking to target high-income professionals, LinkedIn might be your best bet. According to Quantcast, 69% of LinkedIn members have incomes of more than \$60,000, with 31% making between \$60-100,000 and 38% making more than \$100,000. And 47% of LinkedIn users have a college degree, with another 28% holding graduate degrees as well.

Once you've established your target market and determined your strategy, it's time to think about the tactics you're going to use to attract your desired audience of patients. Do you have an advertising budget? Some social media sites allow you to advertise, and these messages can be targeted by geography, affiliations, activities, interests, relationship status, income and even company size. Do you want to depend on creating compelling content to attract new patients? Think about what's important to your target patients and how you can be of service by providing relevant content to meet their needs.

For example, if you've decided to target moms on Facebook, think about what kind of content you can provide to answer their questions about their kids' oral health, about cosmetic services that might be appealing, or new technology you've added to your practice to keep yourself providing the best possible services to your patients. Perhaps they'd be interested in the new staff you've added to ensure the highest quality of care and level of customer service, or services available in your office to help save them time, like

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online appointing or online health history forms. Focus on what types of services you could offer just for patients like them—perhaps a free whitening for mom when all family members come in for their hygiene appointments on schedule for 24 months. And finally, determine how you might communicate these messages to them.

Experts agree

Fred Joyal, CEO and co-founder of 1-800-DENTIST and author of *Everything Is Marketing: The Ultimate Strategy for Dental Practice Growth*, agrees that when it comes to social media, it can be confusing for a dentist to know where to start. “While there is a lot of noise out there in social media, you should make sure you have a presence on Yelp, Facebook and Dr. Oogle,” he said.

“Four out of five adults now participate in social media, so it’s never been so important for you to participate and to provide your potential patients with access to more information about you and your practice,” said Frith Meier, CEO of Sesame Communications. “You have the opportunity, through your social networks, to influence them and guide them directly to your door.”

Today, millions of Americans use social media applications for healthcare research and information. In fact, according to a 2008 report by the California Healthcare Foundation, 34% of Americans searching for health information online go directly to social media sites, behind only health portal sites and general search engines. And a study by the Pew Internet Project shows 55% of consumers want to e-mail their doctors and 61% of Americans go online for health information, with the majority of them turning to user-generated content.

“The dental industry can no longer deny that social media is an integral part of the marketing toolkit,” said Dr. Lou Shuman, President of the Pride Institute, a leading dental practice management company. “I’ve been watching the expansive growth of social media as a technology and believe that it has a natural application in the dental field—it not only allows the dental professional to have a direct dialogue with both existing and prospective patients, but also enables patients to do your marketing for you by creating positive word of mouth about your practice.”

With social media marketing, you can easily build relationships and find your ideal target consumer wherever they naturally congregate online. Now is the time for you to start joining—and leading—the conversation. Go on, get social! •

Naomi Cooper is President of Minoa Marketing Inc., a dental marketing and social media firm based in Los Angeles. With over 15 years of marketing experience and more than eight years as vice president of marketing for one of the leading practice marketing companies in the dental industry, Naomi brings both depth and breadth of marketing expertise to the Pride Institute, where she serves as resident social media expert and Chief Marketing Consultant. Naomi will be presenting “The New Rules of Marketing: Social Media and Online Tactics for Today’s Dental Practice” at a variety of local and national dental meetings and Pride Institute seminars throughout 2010 along with Dr. Lou Shuman, President of the Pride Institute. Naomi can be reached via e-mail at naomi@minoamarketing.com.